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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999) of 6 April 1999, by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report every 90 days on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS).

2. In my last report, dated 27 September 2001 (S/2001/915), I described the precarious nature of the overall situation in Guinea-Bissau, including the deepening crisis of the various state institutions, hampering the effective functioning of government and the development of the country's democratization process.

3. Following their consideration of that report, on 22 October 2001, members of the Council, in a statement to the press, among other things, called upon all institutions of the Government to engage in dialogue, to respect the Constitution and to promote national reconciliation in order to find a way out of the current difficulties. They also called for an integrated and coordinated approach by the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as bilateral donors, to help Guinea-Bissau create income-generating capacity, and acknowledged the need for strengthened dialogue with the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies operating in and around Guinea-Bissau, to enhance coordination.

4. The present report covers developments since that time and outlines continued activities of UNOGBIS and other members of the United Nations system in support of Guinea-Bissau's peace-building process.

II. Political developments

5. During the period under review, the political situation in Guinea-Bissau has remained difficult and volatile. The Government's report that it foiled a coup on 3 December 2001, persistent calls by the opposition for the President's resignation and the dismissal of Prime Minister Faustino Imbali on 7 December, following the removal, on 21 November, of the Foreign Minister, reflected a seemingly deepening institutional, as well as political, crisis.

6. The political process continues to be marked by multiple crises among various institutions. According to the opposition, the arrest and detention of the President of the Supreme Court on allegations of misappropriation of funds were politically motivated and should therefore be rescinded. The executive has insisted that National Assembly rules and procedures do not allow parliament to declare executive acts as unconstitutional. My Representative, Samuel Nana-Sinkam, has sought to facilitate dialogue among the various political parties, the magistrates' association and the executive.

7. The different perceptions of the constitutionality or otherwise of recent executive decisions have engendered harsh rhetoric in parliament, including initiatives from the opposition for the removal of the President from office. The executive has dismissed the process and has affirmed that a parliamentary vote of no confidence did not have any meaningful political

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consequences. At the same time, the executive has sought to strip some vocal opposition legislators of their parliamentary immunity in order that they may be brought to trial on charges of corruption and misappropriation of funds, which opposition parties have stressed are false and politically motivated. Some political actors in the opposition have also reported threats to their lives. Meanwhile, the National Assembly has continued its investigation into the disappearance of some of the US$ 16.3 million from the national treasury and, on 26 November, it summoned Prime Minister Imbali to answer questions about financial irregularities in public spending.

8. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS has continued to promote dialogue and national reconciliation, including through a UNOGBIS-sponsored television forum, entitled "Tema". The Forum, funded by the German Embassy in Dakar, provides an opportunity for the public to discuss topical national concerns and developments. It has also been used to promote better understanding and awareness of the activities of the United Nations system in the country, including, especially, programmes on HIV/AIDS prevention.

9. Through two other recent initiatives, UNOGBIS has sought to enhance the capacity of civil society and youth to play a more active role in building a more stable political environment in their country. In a seminar held on 26 and 27 November in Bissau, with funding provided by the Embassy of the Netherlands, 50 representatives of various religious, youth and women's groups, as well as the media and civil servants, discussed how civil society groups could be mobilized and constructively engaged as partners in the consolidation of Guinea-Bissau's democratization process.

10. In the other event, directed principally at young Bissau Guineans, who constitute an overwhelming majority of the population, UNOGBIS, with financial assistance also from the Embassy of the Netherlands, organized, from 19 to 24 October, a national reconciliation soccer tournament to mark United Nations Day. The tournament comprised teams from different ethnic, political and religious backgrounds, drawn from different parts of the country, and was enthusiastically followed by Bissau Guinean society as a whole.

11. Since informing members of the Council, in my last report, of my plan to explore with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other friends of Guinea-Bissau effective ways and means of assisting President Kumba Yala and his Government to stabilize the political situation in the country, I have discussed the situation in Guinea-Bissau with President Alpha Oumar Konaré of Mali, in his capacity as the Chairman of ECOWAS, and with several other heads of State and Government in the region, as well as outside the region. Subsequently, many of them offered to do whatever they could to support efforts to restore lasting stability in Guinea-Bissau. Special envoys from two other ECOWAS member States, Cape Verde and Senegal, also visited Bissau with messages from their respective Heads of State, Presidents Pedro Pires and Abdoulaye Wade, on the situation inside Guinea-Bissau. Meanwhile, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and ECOWAS have been exploring the possibility of embarking on a joint initiative to contribute to the quest for peace in Guinea-Bissau.

12. In response to invitations from Presidents Pires and Wade, I dispatched my Representative to Cape Verde and Senegal, from 20 to 26 November, where the two Heads of State stressed the need for a regional approach to solving Guinea-Bissau's problems. Emphasis was placed on complementing peacemaking and mediation efforts with economic and financial support from regional partners and the international community at large.

III. Military and security aspects

13. Although security along the border with Senegal has improved during the reporting period, occasional forays into Guinea-Bissau's territory by armed rebels of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) in the Casamance region have continued. In an encouraging development, no major factional fighting by rival MFDC groups was reported from Bissau Guinean territory. Armed attacks against civilian vehicles have nevertheless continued, resulting not only in the theft of goods and money, but also in civilian casualties.

14. Internally, the military authorities have continued to pledge loyalty to the constitutional order, although there are growing indications of concern about the apparent inability of the Government to move the democratic process forward. In a recent statement, the Chief of Defence Staff publicly accused political actors

of diverting funds earmarked for the welfare of the military. Nevertheless, in a positive move, the military authorities have submitted to the Government plans for the reorganization of the armed forces. Meanwhile, military personnel to be demobilized in early 2002 have been identified, following the recent completion of a census of the country's armed forces.

15. As demining activities have continued, the Government has established a Centre for Anti-Mine Action, which has estimated that, while nearly 2,500 mines have been removed thus far, about 20,000 mines still remain in the country.

16. The maintenance of public security continues to encounter serious difficulties, in particular inadequate logistical facilities, limited training for police personnel and the wide circulation of small arms inside the country and along its borders with the Senegalese province of Casamance. There is also concern that, unless demobilized and retired former combatants are properly reintegrated into civilian life, they could, if left idle, constitute a potential threat to public order.

IV. Economic and social aspects

17. While mounting social and economic grievances have continued to sharpen political tensions, persistent political instability has also affected economic performance, including the flow of aid. Widespread poverty is not only adding to social instability, but is also generating skepticism about the still elusive dividends of the nascent democracy. As opportunities for young secondary school graduates to pursue higher studies continue to decrease, the number of unemployed young people, the largest group in the society, is increasing at an alarming rate, making this a particularly worrying challenge.

18. As the principal employer in the country, the Government's inability to pay civil service salaries on time, including meeting months of accumulated arrears, has generated enormous social and economic hardship and tensions. While the sharp fall in the price of cashew nuts, the principal cash crop, is seen as the main reason for the Government's serious financial problems, it is also widely felt that corruption at different levels of State administration is also a factor. It is against that background that President Yala's recent threat to dismiss 60 per cent of civil servants for corruption and fraud, and the Government's decision to set up a Special Anti-corruption Unit in the Ministry of Justice, can be seen. UNOGBIS, for its part, and with financial support from the Embassy of the Netherlands, organized a seminar on 29 and 30 October in Bissau, in cooperation with the Office of the Inspector General against Corruption, to consider ways to improve the functioning of the country's anti-corruption mechanisms. The seminar, which was attended by some 60 participants, including senior government officials, as well as representatives of civil society, agreed on a set of recommendations on practical measures to enhance the efficiency of State structures in fighting corruption and eliminating impunity from justice in that regard.

19. The Bretton Woods institutions have remained constructively engaged with Guinea-Bissau in a number of key sectors. The World Bank has continued to support demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration, and also envisages moving forward with programmes of assistance in the education and health sectors. In the area of public finances, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has continued to monitor Guinea-Bissau's macroeconomic framework, with a view to restoring financial discipline to meet World Bank/IMF requirements. To that end, an IMF mission visited Bissau from 21 to 24 November, to assess the progress made.

V. Human rights

20. By late November 2001, all detainees linked by the authorities to the attempted military uprising led by the late General Ansumane Mane in November 2000, had reportedly been released. However, following the reported coup attempt on 3 December, a number of people, including military officers, were said to have been detained.

21. The lack of appropriate codes on media practice in the country complicated relations between the Government and the media, with the latter accusing the Government of restricting freedom of speech and press, while the Government criticizes the press for allegedly not exercising its extensive freedoms responsibly. Tensions between the two sides have recently begun to subside, as discussions on a draft press code have started. In this regard, UNOGBIS, with financial support from the Embassy of France in Bissau and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Dakar, recently prepared and published a "Reference document", highlighting the principles and practices of journalism

in a democratic society. UNOGBIS, furthermore, with financial assistance from the German Embassy, made available modern broadcasting equipment to State television and to government and private radio services.

22. UNOGBIS has also continued to organize training programmes for military and police staff, with a view to sensitizing them with regard to respect for human rights. To that end, on 8 and 9 November, it organized in Gabu (200 km from Bissau) a human rights training seminar for 300 soldiers, civil police members and representatives of civil society. Another seminar was organized in Bissau from 20 to 23 November, to train members of the recently established Inter-Ministerial Committee on the preparation of their reports on the implementation of United Nations human rights treaties and conventions to which Guinea-Bissau is a party.

23. In continuation of its support for capacity-building efforts in the judiciary and the Ministry of Justice, UNOGBIS, with financial support of the Embassy of the Netherlands, organized, from 22 October to 19 November in Bissau, a refresher course for 23 magistrates and 67 staff members of the Ministry of Justice and the office of the Attorney-General.

VI. Coordination of the activities of the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau

24. In carrying out the activities described in the present report, UNOGBIS and the other members of the United Nations system on the ground have worked closely together and with Guinea-Bissau's other international partners, in a common determination to strengthen the capacity of State institutions to function more effectively and to prevent conflict.

25. In an effort to further enhance coordination among them, UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team recently developed a "strategic vision" designed to assist Guinea-Bissau's peace-building process in the short to medium term. This comprehensive peace-building strategy integrates such programming concepts as the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The immediate goal is to help prevent the country from relapsing into armed conflict by addressing the root causes of its crises. To implement the strategy, a series of integrated, systemic and phased programme inputs in the political, social and economic spheres are envisaged and interlinked to reinforce each other and to help the Government to achieve three core objectives: accountable and transparent governance within the context of a broad-based participatory political framework; political and social stability that rests on equity and respect of human rights; and broad-based economic prosperity.

26. In the ensuing distribution of labour among the members of the United Nations country team, the United Nations Development Programme has taken the lead in designing rapid income yielding projects in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to target the rural population, within the overall framework of promoting poverty alleviation. In the same manner, FAO has provided leadership in the thematic group composed of the World Bank, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA and non-governmental organizations responsible for addressing the rehabilitation of rural infrastructure. In all cases, UNOGBIS continues to work with the other members of the country team to ensure a carefully coordinated, integrated and effective peace-building process.

VII. Observations

27. The situation in Guinea-Bissau remains a source of deep concern. The great expectations and widespread optimism that accompanied the restoration of democracy nearly two years ago have failed to deliver the stability and progress the people wanted and justly deserve. Not only does the quest for national reconciliation remain a challenge, but the threat that even the modest democratic gains achieved so far can easily be reversed is dangerously real. I appeal once again to political actors at all levels to continue to resolve their differences through dialogue and within the framework of the Constitution.

28. The preservation and consolidation of peace would help to create conditions in which economic growth and an improvement in the living conditions of the people of Guinea-Bissau can take place. I therefore welcome the growing determination of regional leaders to contribute actively to the achievement of a level of accommodation among the political actors that would

help to restore stability and confidence. I also wish to reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to work for a brighter future for the people of Guinea-Bissau, through the wide range of programmes carried out by members of the United Nations system and in cooperation with national, regional and other partners.

29. In this regard, while recognizing once again that a solution to the country's problems rests essentially in the hands of Bissau Guineans themselves, I wish to reiterate my appeal to the international community to remain engaged with and supportive of Guinea-Bissau, and specifically to contribute generously to the Round Table Conference, rescheduled for early 2002, to help to raise resources to meet both short and medium-term priorities. I am gratified, in this connection, that the Bretton Woods institutions are demonstrating flexibility and understanding in their continuing dialogue with the Government. I trust that the Government will, for its part, continue to work with the World Bank and IMF, as well as with its bilateral partners, to improve the country's economic and social prospects.

30. Finally, I wish to pay tribute to my Representative, Samuel Nana-Sinkam, and to the staff of the entire United Nations country team for their tireless efforts to help to keep the peace-building process in Guinea-Bissau on course, despite multiple challenges.